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ABSTRACT

The sensitivity of the cumulative cloze task to the effects of contextual buildup across units of discourse larger than the sentence was investigated, with three experiments focusing on a comparative analysis of proficient and developmental readers. In cumulative cloze, a single target word is deleted from a passage and replaced by the same nonsense word every time. The first two experiments established testing procedures and hypotheses. Using college students as subjects, these experiments indicated a direct relationship between the proportion of subjects identifying the correct item and successive exposure of text sections. Patterns of wrong answers showed how accumulating context reduced the range of alternative responses. Although the difficulty level of the material was below subjects' processing abilities, performance on the cumulative cloze appeared to discriminate between more and less proficient readers. The third experiment used elementary school students (grades three to seven) and also reflected the accumulating effects of context. Differences in good and poor readers' choices in the third experiment showed that poor readers often abandoned a correct response once it had been identified. This performance characteristic suggested that poor readers may be unable to maintain a schemata over longer units of discourse. (RL)

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Studying Contextual Build-Up During Reading
Through Cumulative Cloze

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Studying Contextual Build-Up During Reading Through Cumulative Cloze

The cloze procedure has been and continues to be one of the most actively researched topics in the field of reading. Rankin (1978) relates that after twenty years of collecting bibliographic references and documents, he has accumulated over 600 separate reports on the cloze procedure - the bulk of these concerned primarily with comprehension and/or readability issues. Despite this volume of effort there remains considerable controversy over what it is that the cloze procedure measures and, therefore, what insights it offers into the reading process or individual reader strategies. Most authorities would agree that at the very least the conventional cloze task will yield an index of interaction between the contextual richness surrounding deleted elements and the student's ability to utilize this information constructively. At the sentence level, this task seems well suited in a measurement sense to many of the current so-called psycholinguistic and interactive models of the reading process (e.g., Goodman, 1972; Rumelhart, 1975). Such models portray reading as a constructive process in which the text is comprehended through interactions between the reader's prior knowledge and the information in the text. The developing schematic structures accompanying this interaction form an internal representation of text meaning in the reader.

There is accumulating empirical evidence to support these kinds of conceptual models of the comprehension process. Goodman's (1967) proposal that readers utilize their own semantic base and a process of conceptual build-up to recreate the author's message is confirmed in part, for example,

by Menosky's (1971) research with miscue analysis demonstrating that the "quality" of the miscues (i.e., the more contextually sensitive observed deviations from the text during oral reading) varies in direct relation to the portion of the text being read. Bransford and Johnson's (1972) inquiry into the process by which information is integrated into wholistic, syntactic ideas as prose is read has become the basis for numerous subsequent studies which have demonstrated the build-up and use of context in the comprehension process. The more recent articulation of a schema based theory of reading comprehension (Anderson, et al., 1977) supported by research at the Center for the Study of Reading, offer converging evidence that the power of prior knowledge and context influences performance across all levels of discourse processing.

One of the disturbing facts about conventional cloze as an index of comprehension ability has been the relative insensitivity of this measure to the influence of context beyond the immediate sentence level. That is, past studies indicate the ability to complete the traditional cloze task is bilaterally constrained at about 4 to 5 words on either side of the deletion (MacGinitie, 1961; Miller and Coleman, 1967). Carroll (1972) argues that cloze performance is largely influenced and limited by linguistic clues in the immediate context around the missing word and, therefore, cloze scores do not assess or reflect the ability to comprehend major ideas in a message.

Margaret Smith-Burke, et al. (1978) report a study in which the influence of context on cloze performance was investigated by having subjects read four passages under three prior context conditions: (a) only the cloze passage, (b) the cloze passage preceded by 250 words of the text, and (c) the cloze passage preceded by two pages of the text. No statistically significant effects of prior context were found on cloze performance. One

interpretation of the data they offer from the perspective of discourse analysis is that the demands of the cloze task may be interfering with the subject's ability to utilize the strong cuing systems of connected discourse, forcing the subject to attend to syntactic and semantic information at the sentence level. They conclude that if this is in fact the case, then conventional cloze may not be a good measure of the reading process. They argue that the problem with conventional cloze is that it is based on a statistical rather than a linguistic model of language.

One of the few studies offering support for cloze being sensitive to linguistic constraints beyond individual sentences has been reported by Ramanouskas (1972). In this study, performance on a conventional cloze task was compared between normal passages and passages in which the order of the sentences had been randomized. Since no changes had been made within the sentences themselves, it was hypothesized that higher scores in the normal passages would support inter-sentence sensitivity of the cloze procedure. While the data confirmed the expectations set forward in the research hypothesis, there seem to be problems with this study which severely limit the conclusions that can be reasonably drawn. First, since the subjects used were classified as mentally retarded, it is questionable whether the findings would generalize to a normal population. Strieb (1976) has summarized research evidence that suggests mentally retarded students are not sensitive to, or at least don't respond to, language constraints and context in the same way as normal readers. More importantly, the Ramanouskas study does not address the rival hypothesis that the differences in performance between the two conditions were the result of a confounding

effect that the distortion of context might have had rather than any facilitating effects across sentences in the normal passage.

It may well be that conventional cloze has taken us as far as it can toward understanding the reading comprehension process. What seems to be needed is more research and development with alternative formats of cloze which preserve the essence of a contextually constrained task but are more sensitive to the demands of processing larger units of discourse. Modified cloze techniques such as Guthrie's (1973) maze procedure and Carver's (1975) Programmed Prose, indicate significant advances in this direction, but these adaptations have been devised largely on the basis of psychometric and/or instructional concerns. To date, none of these or similar cloze type tasks have been able to effectively reflect the reader's use of contextual build-up across larger units of discourse. The purpose of this paper will be to report progress on the development of a modified cloze technique termed cumulative cloze which offers a potentially more powerful means for studying the reading process and individual reader characteristics. The cumulative cloze procedure was devised in part based on a strategy lesson proposed by Goodman and Burke (1974) to develop contextual awareness.

In cumulative cloze, the same single target word is deleted each time it appears in the passage. In its place each time is substituted a nonsense word (such as "stik"). The same nonsense word is used consistently throughout the passage for the target word. The task for the reader is to attempt to identify the nonsense word each time it is encountered in the text. The text is exposed to the reader in sections up to the end of the sentence after each appearance of the target word. A sample text, which has been sectioned for presentation, appears in Figure 1.

As a performance task the cumulative cloze procedure seems well suited to a constructivist perspective for context such as that presented in schema theory. Anderson (1977) identifies at least three critical phases in a schema-theory explanation of reading comprehension. These include: (1) schema selection -- the calling forth of the appropriate general schemata to interpret the text; (2) schema instantiation -- the filling of the variable slots within the schematic structures based on information provided in the text; and (3) schema maintenance -- keeping that appropriate schemata to the front for use in interpreting and anticipating text events. It would seem reasonable to hypothesize that successive predictions made by readers on a cumulative cloze task would be reflective of this three stage process.

A series of three experiments were designed and executed to investigate the sensitivity of the cumulative cloze task to the effects of contextual build-up across units of discourse larger than the sentence. The research project focussed on an analysis and comparison of performance characteristics of proficient and developmental readers on this task.

Experiment 1

Subjects

The subjects for this first study were 41 college undergraduates enrolled in reading methods classes at The University of Texas at Austin. Participation was on a voluntary basis.

Materials

The five passages used in the cumulative cloze format were chosen from the set of 2nd and 3rd grade 100-word passages studies by Bormouth (1969). The passages had been originally selected from curriculum materials used as these two grade levels.

The deleted item for each passage was limited to a noun appearing at least six times in separate sentences across the 100-word passage. These selection criteria yielded five passages containing six sections each (i.e., six chances for item identification in each passage). The passages were reproduced with orator type and transparencies made for use in overhead projection. The target word for each of the passages was replaced with the same nonsense word each time it occurred in context. The target word was also noted at the top of each passage.

Procedures

All subjects were tested early in the semester with the National Reading Standards (NRS) exam to determine overall achievement levels in reading. The NRS is a timed exam employing a forced choice cloze format across increasingly difficulty levels of text material. Student achievement in grade level terms ranged from 10.4 to 16.0 with a mean score of 12.9.

One month later these same subjects were administered the cumulative cloze task over five passages in small group settings. A warm-up passage was worked through to orient the subjects to the task before beginning work on the five treatment passages. Each passage was presented section by section using an overhead projector. As each new section was exposed, it was read silently by the subjects. Sufficient time was provided for each subject to record a guess before subsequent sections of the text were revealed. The correct target word was given after the work with each passage had been completed.

Results and Discussion

Given the exploratory level of this investigation into cumulative cloze performance, the data were analyzed largely in descriptive terms

with only the most general hypotheses regarding relationships among variables. The starting point was to look at group performance on each of the five passages in terms of subject success at identifying the deleted text words by the sixth and final exposure in context. These percentages are presented in Table 1 for each of the passages. It was found that in the case of Passage 6 the incorrect response "buffalo" was favored by over 58% of the respondents at the final exposure point as compared with the 37% who identified the correct target term - "deer" at the same point. In the face of such apparent ambiguity a decision was made to eliminate this passage from subsequent stages of data analysis.

Group performance across the four remaining passages was then analyzed in terms of the proportion of subjects ($N = 41$) identifying the deleted words at each of the six exposure points (Figure 2). As predicted, there was a direct relationship between the proportion of subjects identifying the correct item and each successive exposure of text sections. An examination of the wrong answers given is also revealing of the effect of accumulating context on reducing the range of alternative responses (Figure 3). This graph indicates a general trend toward a reduced range of word types offered as the subjects progressed through the passages. While the profile for performance on this cloze type task by this group of subjects might be interpreted as support for the effects of context across units larger than a sentence, these findings might just as easily be explained as a function of chance. The fact that the likelihood of encountering the target word in a more contextually "rich" environment increased with each exposure independent of the prior contexts in which it occurred could just as easily explain the results as any accumulating effect of context. In

order to explore this rival hypothesis, a second experiment was conducted.

Experiment 2

Subjects

The subjects for this second study were a new group of 48 college undergraduates from a similar background as those participating in the first experiment. Again, participation was on a voluntary basis.

Materials

Test materials were devised for this study based on the performance of subjects in experiment 1. Each of the four cumulative cloze passages was examined to determine at which of the six exposure points the maximum gain (MG) was realized in terms of the percent increase of subjects correctly identifying the target word. The exposure point at which the next largest gain (NLG) was achieved on each passage was determined in a similar manner. It was discovered that on one passage ("check") the percent of subjects identifying the correct word on the first exposure (66%) exceeded the gain on any subsequent exposure. Since the maximum gain (MG) sentence from this passage was by definition uninfluenced by prior context, a decision was made to exclude this passage from any comparisons made in this second experiment. The contextually rich (MG and NLG) sentences from each of the three remaining passages were used to create two new cloze tests of a more traditional format (Figure 4). Each test (forms A and B) contained one or the other of the two sentences (MG and NLG) from each of the three treatment passages. The same nonsense words were retained from the original passages.

Procedures

The subjects in this second study were given, on a random basis, one or the other of the two forms of this cloze test ($N = 24$ for each of the

tests). They were directed to read each of the three sentences on their test and by using the immediate context of the sentence guess at the identity of the nonsense word. They were asked to record this guess in the space provided after each sentence. It was explained that the three sentences as well as the three words to be identified were unrelated to one another. No time limits were given.

Results and Discussion

Figures 5 and 6 present a comparison between a randomly selected subsample ($N = 24$) of Ss from Study 1 (Full Context Condition) and the Study 2 subjects (Immediate Context Only Condition) in terms of the accuracy of identification of the target word. Note that on the next largest gain (NLG) set of sentences, the score under the three Immediate Context Only Condition was 0% for all subjects ($N = 24$) responding on these items. There is an apparent effect for prior context toward greater accuracy of identification on all three passages on both the MG and NLG sentences independent of the immediate frame in which they occurred. A comparison of performance between these same two groups was also made with respect to the range of word types on the Maximum Gain (MG) sentences (Figure 7). Once again, full context seems to exert a limiting effect on the range of alternative word types offered independent of the immediate sentence context.

Up to this point we have considered only the effects of context across total groups of students. What about individual differences and the ability or inclination to fully utilize surrounding context in making guesses. There is considerable controversy in the research literature as to whether good and poor readers utilize context equally. In an effort to assess individual performance on cumulative cloze relative to general reading ability level a more in depth analysis of Study 1 data was undertaken. For each

subject, a total cumulative cloze (TCC) score was computed based on the total number of times the correct words were given across all passages. So, for example, a subject who achieved identification of the target word at point 4 on two of the passages and at point 6 on the remaining two would receive a TCC Score of 8. Such a system for scoring is sensitive to both correctness and the point at which items are identified. The range of scores for the group of subjects in Experiment 1 on the TCC variable ranged from 5 to 18 with a mean score of 12.3.

The eight subjects from Experiment 1 with the highest NRS reading achievement scores ($\bar{X} = 11.1$) were then compared with respect to the TCC variable to the eight subjects from Experiment 1 with the lowest NRS scores. The mean TCC score for the higher NRS group was 12.7, while the mean TCC score for the lower NRS group was 11.2. Even though the difficulty level of the material is well below the processing abilities of all subjects, performance on the cumulative cloze task does appear to discriminate between the performance of more and less proficient readers.

This finding led logically to a whole new set of unexplored questions: How might readers at earlier developmental stages respond to this task? How might readers respond when the difficulty level of the stimulus materials more closely resembled the ability levels of the students? To pursue these questions, a third and final experiment was conducted.

Experiment 3

Subjects

The subjects for this third study were 34 elementary aged students (grades 3-7) attending a summer tutorial program at The University of Texas at Austin. These students ranged in reading ability from early second through seventh grade levels as measured by the Wide Range Achievement Test ($\bar{X} = 4.4$).

Procedures

The subjects were tested with the cumulative cloze task on an individual basis. The same four passages used in Experiment 1 were included in this study as well. After practicing on a warm-up passage during which the cumulative cloze task was explained, each of the experimental passages was worked through section by section. The investigators read the passage orally to the students as they read along silently from the same copy. The investigators were responsible for recording the guesses made at each point on the protocol before exposing the next section of text. The correct target word was given after the work with each passage had been completed.

Results and Discussion

Success on each of the passages in terms of the identification of the target element by the final exposure was far inferior to that of the adult subjects in the first study. A similar, though far less dramatic trend toward higher proportions of students identifying the correct items as they moved through the passages found in the first experiment was also evident in the performance of the elementary students on this task (Figure 8). This would lend support to the hypothesis that performance on this cloze type task is sensitive to and reflects the accumulating effects of context on developing as well as proficient readers.

Efforts to demonstrate that the ability to utilize this growing context could be differentiated in terms of reader ability were more difficult to realize. Following the same basic procedures outlined in Experiment 1, the ten elementary students with the greatest positive discrepancy in favor of reading ability (utilizing WRAT scores) over assigned grade level as well as the ten elementary students with the greatest negative discrepancy in terms of assigned grade level over reading

achievement levels were identified. The first group (good readers) showed an average reading score of +1.6 years over their assigned grade levels, while the second (poor readers) had an average reading score of -2.4 years below their assigned grade level.

Total Cumulative Cloze (TCC) scores were then computed in a manner similar to that in Experiment 1. The mean TCC for the good readers was 3.8 while for the poor readers it was 3.4--hardly a significant difference in any sense of the word. To pursue this comparative analysis one step further, a comparison was made between the good and poor groups across the six frames on all four passages with respect to accuracy of identification at each exposure point (Figure 9).

This graph provides some possible insights into why no differences were found between the TCC scores of the two ability groups. Apparently it was not uncommon for poor readers to abandon a correct response once it had been identified, while this was something of a rare occurrence among the better readers. The TCC score is largely insensitive to this phenomenon.

This performance characteristic would lend support to the notion that one problem of poor readers is their inability to maintain a schemata over longer units of discourse. That is, the poor readers are disproportionately tuned into the immediate context of the sentence and not to the developing one which extends across a passage. This finding would also lend support to the conclusions drawn by Hoffman and Condon (1978) relative to the effects of context poor readers. They found that in oral reading poor readers use context in a similar way to good readers as an aid to the identification of unknown elements, but that unlike good readers, context is just as likely to interfere with the recognition

of items they had previously been able to identify without a context.

Summary

These three experiments are more suggestive than definitive in the information they offer. First, it seems rather clear that both developmental and proficient readers do in fact utilize context across units larger than the sentence - at least as measured by the cumulative cloze task. Second, the analysis of good and poor reader performance would suggest that these groups utilize this contextual information in different ways and to different degrees.

Further research with this procedure is certainly warranted. It seems at these still formative stages of research three priorities stand out. On the one hand, work is needed on the identification of optimal passage types and word deletion criteria. Passages which provide too much information in a single frame and early on are clearly unacceptable, while passages which allow for little chance of success by the last frame are just as undesirable.

A second priority for this kind of research relates to techniques for qualitative analysis of "incorrect" responses which are sensitive to the individual reader's use of the accumulating context. Such procedures as Finn's (1978) "feature analysis transfer" characteristics might be of some use in this kind of research.

A final, though perhaps premature, priority is research with the cumulative cloze procedure as a teaching device. Our initial work with this procedure grew out of instructional efforts at sensitizing students to the information in context. It may well be that its most fruitful applications will ultimately be found in this realm.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. An example of a passage sectioned for use in the cumulative cloze task.

Figure 2. Proportion of subjects identifying the target words across all passages at successive exposure points.

Figure 3. Average number of word types offered by all subjects across all passages at succeeding exposure points.

Figure 4. Sample test for MG and NLG sentences used in Experiment 2.

Figure 5. A comparison of subject performance on Maximum Gain (MG) sentences between Full Passage Conditions and Immediate Context Only Conditions.

Figure 6. A comparison of subject performance on Next Largest Gain (NLG) sentences between the Full Passage Conditions and Immediate Context Only Conditions.

Figure 7. A comparison of the number of alternative word types offered on Maximum Gain (MG) sentences between the Full Passage Conditions and Immediate Context Only Conditions.

Figure 8. The proportion of elementary subjects identifying the target words across all passages at succeeding exposure points.

Figure 9. The proportion of good and poor readers identifying the target words across all passages at succeeding exposure points.

Stik

1 An inspector walks into the laboratory of the City
Health Department. He hands a bottle of stik to a worker.

2 "Here's a sample of stik," he says.

 "I wish you would test it please,"

3 The laboratory worker looks at a drop of the stik under
a microscope.

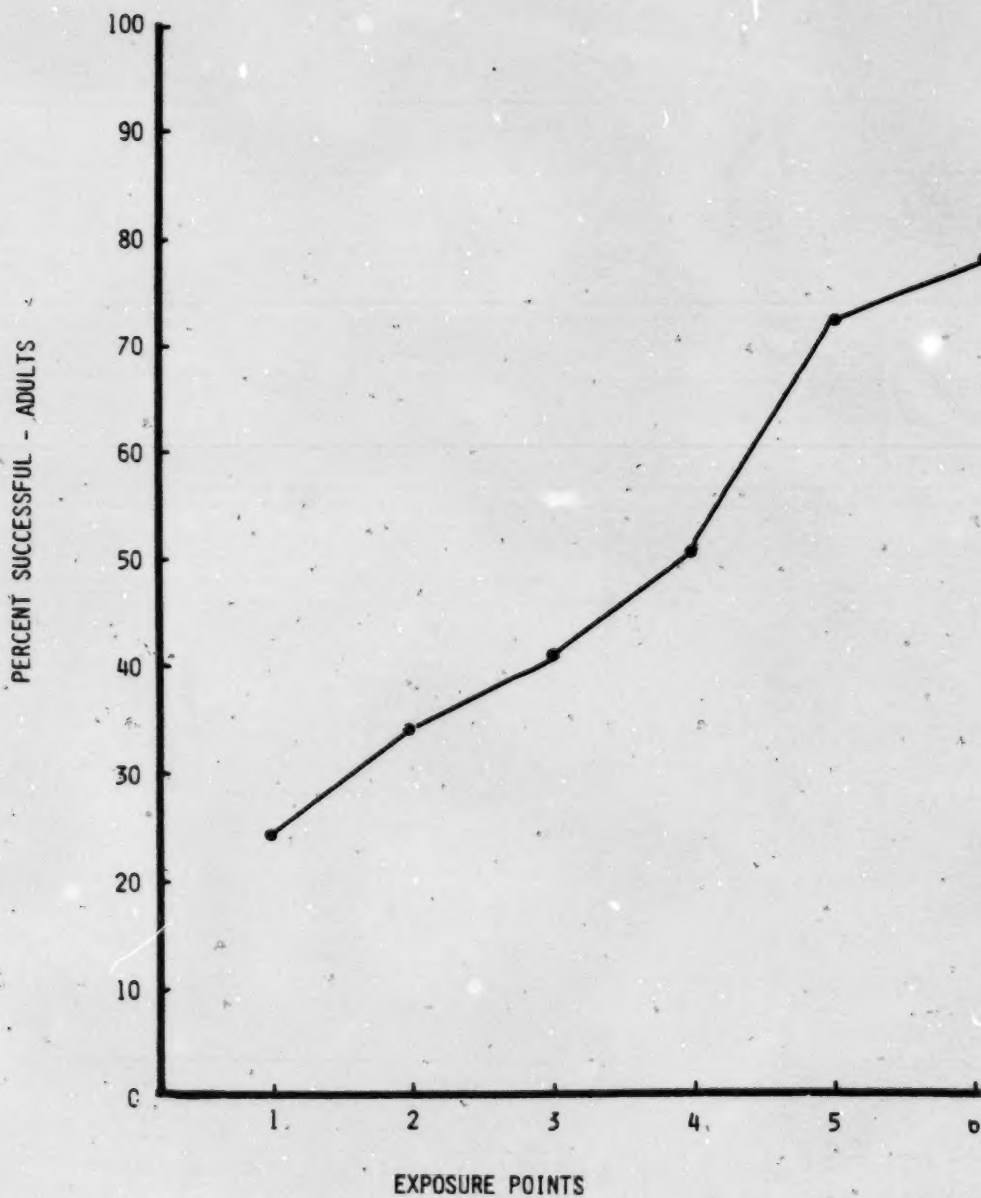
4 If too many germs are found, the stik is not safe to drink.

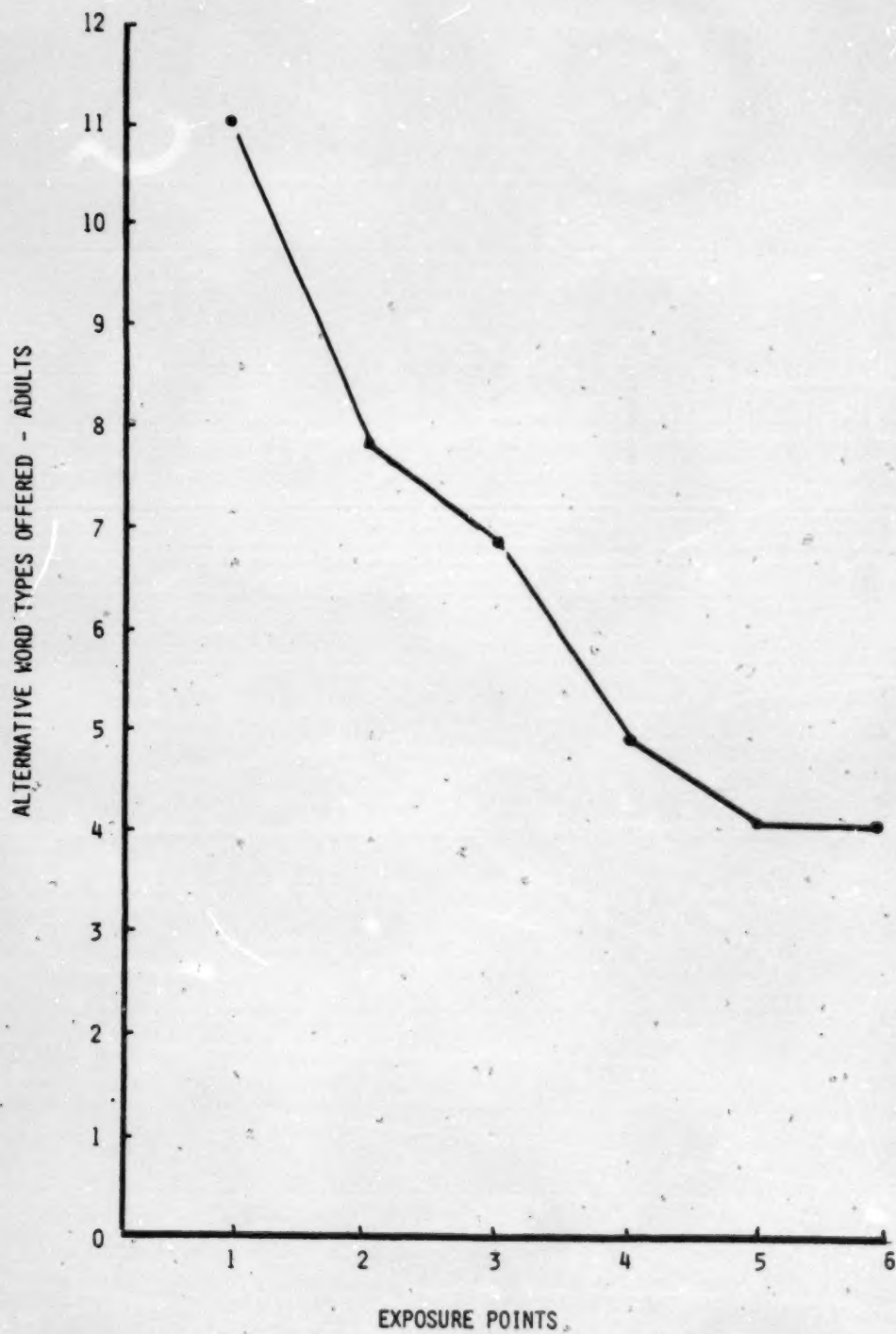
5 When this happens, the dairy has to stop selling its stik
until it is discovered what is wrong.

6 Stik sold in your city is tested in the Health Department's
laboratory.

Table 1
Percent of Subjects Successful at Identifying the
Deleted Text Words on the Sixth and Final
Exposure in Context

<u>Passage</u>	<u>Percentages</u>
1. Check (slir)	98%
2. Bank (shum)	71%
3. Milk (stik)	100%
4. Soil (chub)	63%
5. Deer (gret)	37%





ON THE NEXT PAGE ARE THREE SENTENCES. IN EACH OF THESE SENTENCES A REAL WORD HAS BEEN REMOVED AND A NONSENSE WORD SUBSTITUTED. YOUR TASK IS TO GUESS THE IDENTITY OF THE WORD THAT HAS BEEN REMOVED BY USING THE CONTEXT OF THE SENTENCE IN WHICH IT OCCURS. RECORD YOUR GUESS AFTER EACH SENTENCE IN THE SPACE PROVIDED. THE THREE SENTENCES THAT YOU WILL BE WORKING ON AS WELL AS THE THREE WORDS WHICH HAVE BEEN REMOVED ARE UNRELATED TO ONE ANOTHER. YOU MAY TAKE AS MUCH TIME AS YOU NEED BUT PLEASE MAKE AN ATTEMPT ON EACH ITEM.

When this happens, the dairy has to stop selling its stik until it is discovered what is wrong.

STIK = _____

Through them you can see the shum's workers and customers, as well as a uniformed guard who is not armed.

SHUM'S = _____

The size of the particles makes chubs different from one another.

CHUBS = _____

